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Eau Claire City-County Health Department Urges Deer Hunters to Avoid Tick Bites

Eau Claire, WI – November 19, 2013 – Deer hunting season is upon us in Wisconsin and the Eau Claire City-County Health Department is urging hunters to be aware of blacklegged ticks, also known as deer ticks, when they are out in heavily wooded areas.

While the risk of acquiring a tickborne illness is highest from spring through summer when ticks are most active, people should still be concerned about tick activity into late autumn, especially if the weather is warm. Recent tick surveillance conducted by the University of Wisconsin-Madison found large populations in western Wisconsin during 2013.

To date, there have been five tickborne diseases identified in Wisconsin that occur following bites of blacklegged ticks. These diseases include Lyme disease, anaplasmosis, ehrlichiosis, babesiosis, and Powassan virus disease. While Lyme disease is the tickborne illness most people are aware of, during 2012 the Wisconsin Department of Health Services received over 600 reports of non-Lyme disease tickborne illnesses throughout the state. Tickborne illnesses can result in mild symptoms that require out-patient treatment to severe infections that require hospitalization, or if left untreated can lead to long term health issues or even death.

“Everyone should take precautions to prevent tick bites when they spend time outdoors, and this is especially true for hunters in the woods,” said Lieske Giese, Health Department Director. She went on to say the key to preventing tickborne diseases is to avoid tick bites, and to find and remove ticks promptly.

The following steps can help deer hunters prevent tick bites and reduce the chance of getting tickborne diseases:

- Use effective tick repellents and apply according to the label instructions. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends using repellents with 20% DEET on exposed skin and clothing to prevent tick bites, but users should take special care to avoid spraying in the hands, eyes and mouth. Repellents that contain permethrin can also be applied to clothing.

- Wear clothes that will help shield you from ticks. Long-sleeved shirts and long pants are best. Tuck pants into the top of socks or boots to create a “tick barrier.” Light-colored clothing makes ticks easier to spot. The dark colored ticks will also show up well against blaze orange hunting clothing.
- Check your body frequently for ticks, and remove them promptly. Blacklegged ticks are small and may be difficult to find, so careful and thorough tick checks must be done on all parts of the body. It is important to pay special attention to areas where ticks tend to hide, such as the head, scalp, and body folds (armpit, behind the knee, groin). Take a shower or a bath as soon as possible to remove any ticks that may still be crawling on you.
- Remove attached ticks slowly and gently, using a pair of thin-bladed tweezers applied as close to the skin as possible. Folk remedies like petroleum jelly, nail polish remover, or burning matches are not safe or effective ways to remove ticks.

For more information about the tickborne infections listed above, visit:
<http://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/communicable/TickBorne/index.htm>

For information on insect repellents: <http://cfpub.epa.gov/oppref/insect/>

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